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Re-envisioning writing instruction in collegiate language courses: Toward a Design approach

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Research on U.S. collegiate FL student & instructor perceptions of writing

- Student views of **presentational communication** (Magnan et. al., 2012, 2014)

- Student perceptions (Hubert, 2012; Mills & Moulton, 2017) & instructor perceptions (ACTFL, 2011; Lefkowitz, 2011) of **writing**

Research on writing pedagogies in U.S. collegiate FL programs

- **Process approaches** (Hubert, 2014; Hubert & Bonzo, 2019; Lefkowitz, 2011; O'Donnell, 2007; Vyatkina, 2011)

- **Genre pedagogies** (Allen & Goodspeed, 2018; Byrnes, Maxim, & Norris, 2010; Goodspeed, 2018; Maxim, 2009)

- Instructor **professional development & knowledge of best practices** for writing instruction (Hubert & Bonzo, 2010, 2019; Lefkowitz, 2011)

Research on writing pedagogies in U.S. collegiate FL programs

"[K]nowledge of current mainstream L2 writing theory and practice continues to be largely absent from the awareness of the U.S. university FL instructional community … instructor focus on grammatical correctness was almost unilaterally found to overshadow the need to help students actually become better writers. Unlike ESL instruction, **novice and intermediate FL writers most often do not actually learn to write in their courses.** FL instructors tend to use writing to springboard the teaching of the other skills, most notably grammar and speaking"

(Hubert & Bonzo, 2019, p. 151, my emphasis)

The study

- **Research questions**:

    1. How do collegiate FL instructors conceptualize, teach, and assess writing?

    2. What affordances and constraints influence participants' conceptualizations and practices of writing instruction?

- **Theoretical framework**: Activity Theory (Engeström, 1999; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006)

Participants

- 18 collegiate French instructors

- 5 men, 13 women

- Native language: English (9), French (7), Haitian Creole (1), Polish (1)

- Specialization: French/Francocophone literature/cultural studies (12), linguistics/SLA/FL education (6)
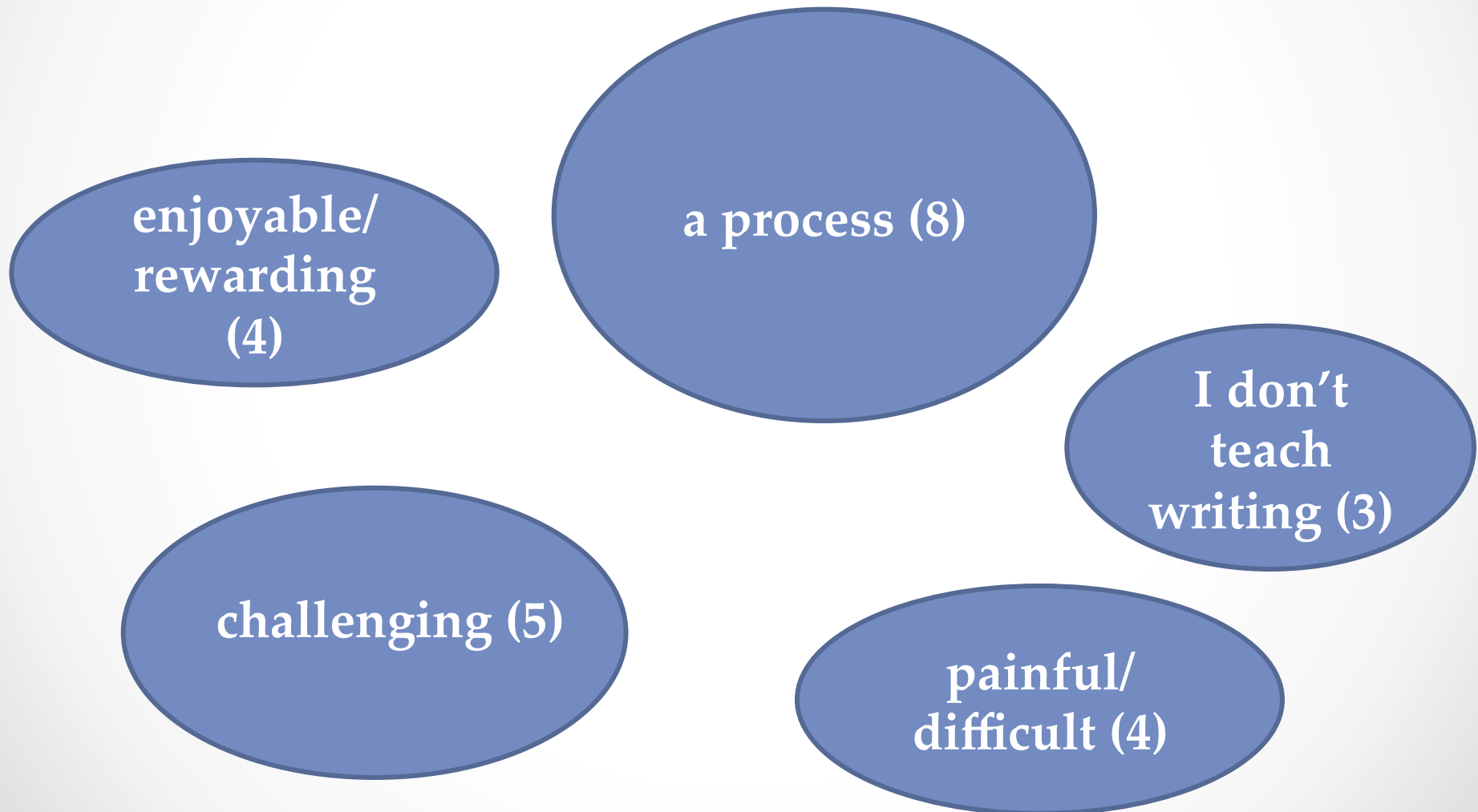
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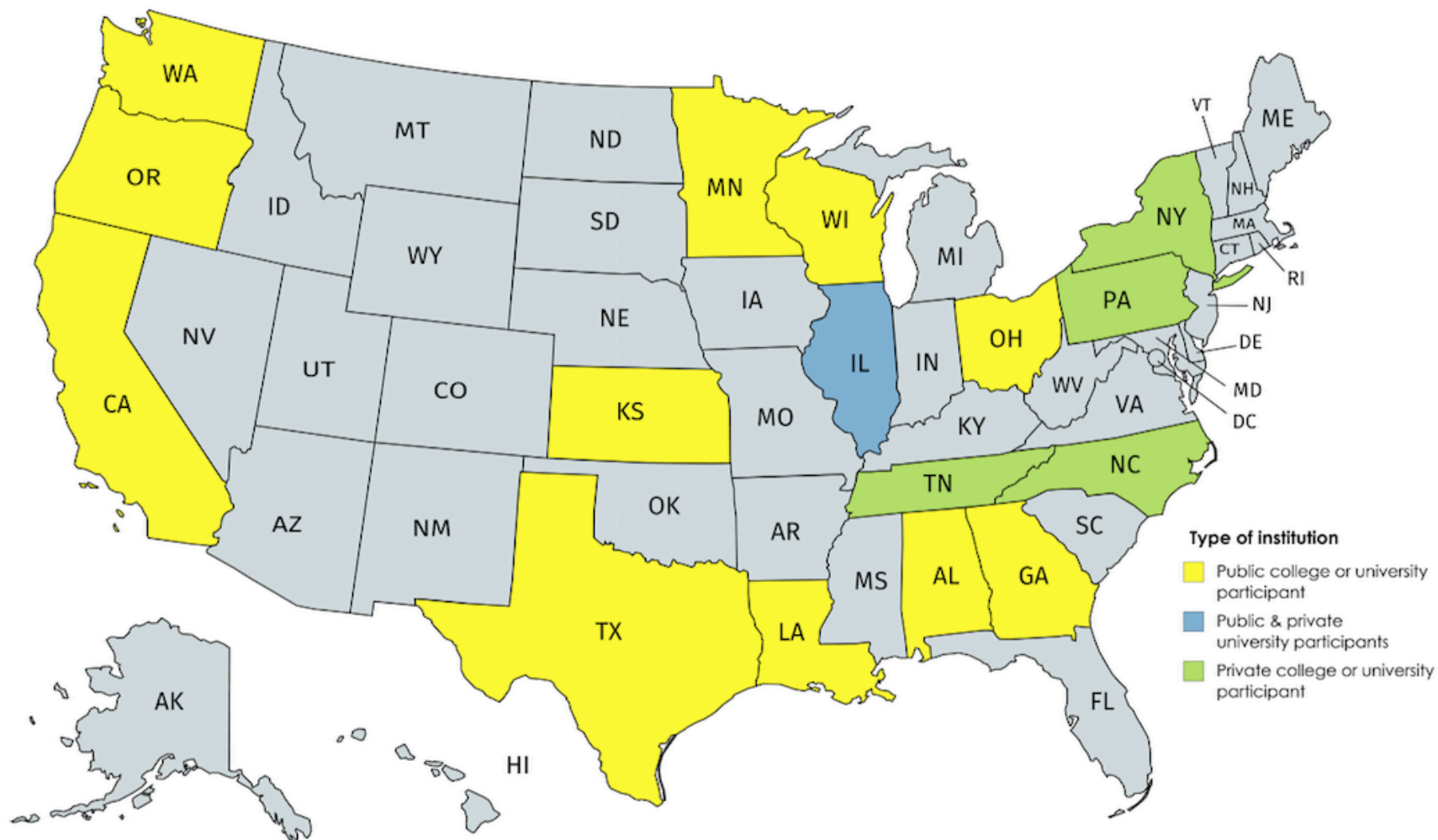
Data sources

- **Survey**: demographic information, teaching history, approaches to writing instruction

- **Interview**: audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, 17 questions, 35-84 minutes duration, coded using MaxQDA

- **Instructional artifacts**: 14 of 18 submitted syllabi, writing rubrics, writing assignments, etc.

Findings RQ1: Conceptualizations

enjoyable/ rewarding (4)

a process (8)

I don't teach writing (3)

challenging (5)

painful/ difficult (4)

Findings RQ1: Pedagogical approaches

process-based (16)

genre-based (8)

difficulty associating teaching practices with an approach/theory (7)

Findings RQ1: Instructional practices

multiple drafts (18)

pre-writing activities (12)

no translation tools (6) vs. responsible use of translation tools (4)

Findings RQ1: Instructional practices

- 11 participants stated that writing receives lower priority than other linguistic modalities in their teaching

- Writing accounted for, on average, 5% of final grade in first-year courses, 15% in second-year, and 35% in advanced undergraduate French courses

- Common assignments in first- and second-year courses were "short paragraphs" or "compositions"; in advanced courses, essays and close reading / textual analysis were most frequently used
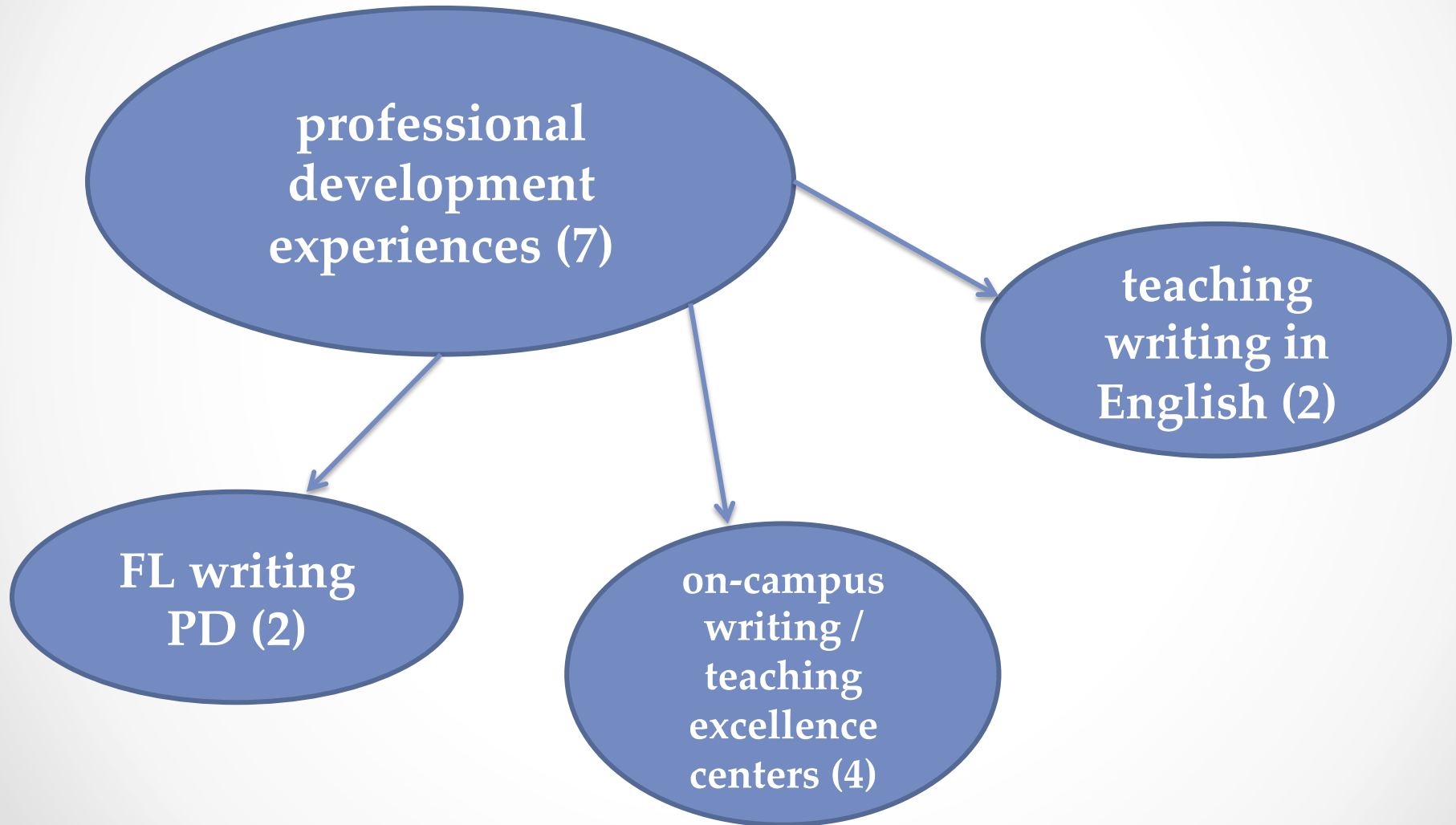
Findings RQ1: Feedback & assessment

rubrics (14)

peer review (7)

correction codes (11)

Findings RQ2: Affordances

professional development experiences (7)

teaching writing in English (2)

FL writing PD (2)

on-campus writing / teaching excellence centers (4)

Findings: Constraints

time (11)

lack of knowledge / professional development (7)

self beliefs (9)

Findings: Synthesis

- Participants conceptualized writing in highly individualized ways; their approaches to teaching writing diverged and were informed by theory in many cases, most often indirectly

- Several process writing strategies were largely shared among participants; these focused on cognitive and linguistic aspects of writing

- Data revealed a potentially problematic gap in the treatment of writing in beginning/intermediate vs. advanced undergraduate courses

- The majority of participants (11 of 18) have not received training or participated in professional development on teaching writing in a FL

- On campus teaching/writing centers function as a valuable affordance for FL writing instruction; however, FL-specific professional development opportunities should be expanded to improve the knowledge base related to this critical area of teaching

Learning to write involves
5 kinds of knowledge
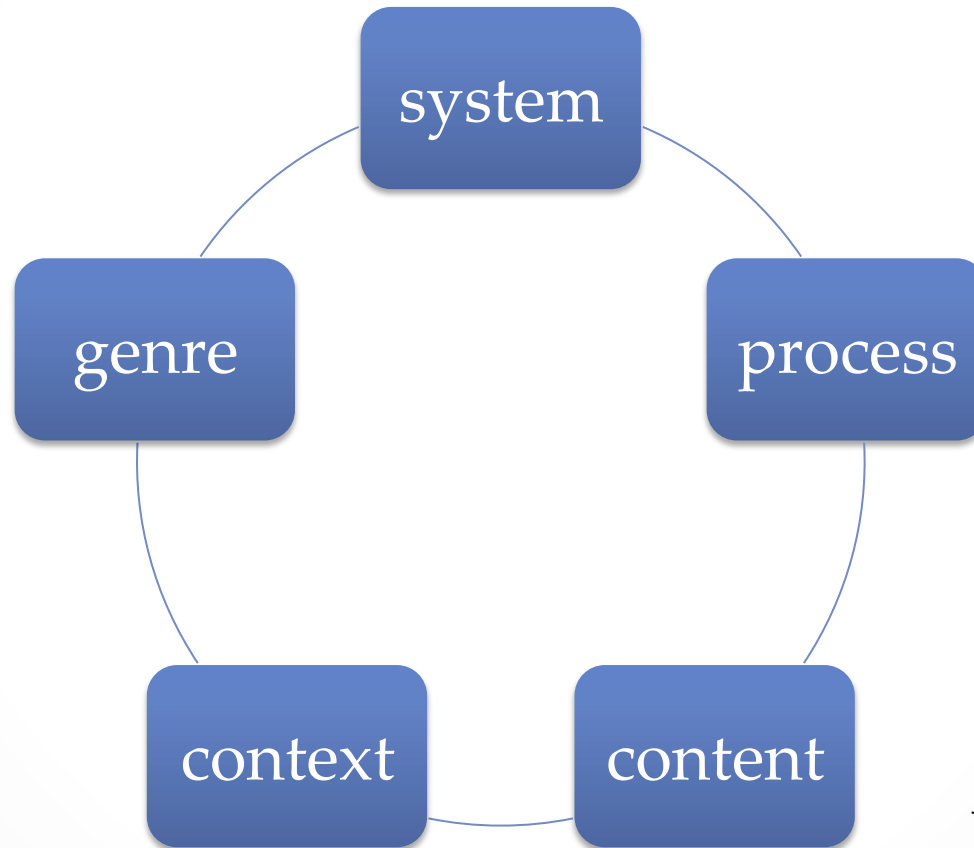
Hyland (2011)

What approach(es) is/are most appropriate for collegiate FL writing instruction?

- "[W]e might see the research as advising us to **reject a single formula for teaching writing** and look at what the different models tell us" (Hyland, 2011, p. 32)

- "[N]o single theoretical perspective can provide all the answers" (Racelis & Matsuda, 2013, p. 390)

- "**an integrative, student-centered approach** . . . that also attends to the interdependencies among textual products, cognitive processes, and sociocultural factors"(Kern, 2000, p. 185)

What is writing from a Design perspective?

- A communicative act--both individual & creative as well as socially constrained

- Multidimensional--linguistic, cognitive, & sociocultural (Kern, 2000)

- A way of responding to a given communicative situation through a process of making choices among meaning resources or *Available Designs* (Kalantzis, Cope, Chan & Dalley-Trim, 2016)

"Design has to do with the conception, planning, and shaping of some artifact for some intended purpose … design focuses our attention on creative human processes … [and] signifies the products of those processes … design involves the interaction of material resources, social resources, and individual resources—and reciprocally produces new resources for future acts of design" (Kern, 2015, p. 2)

5 elements of a Design approach (Allen, 2018)
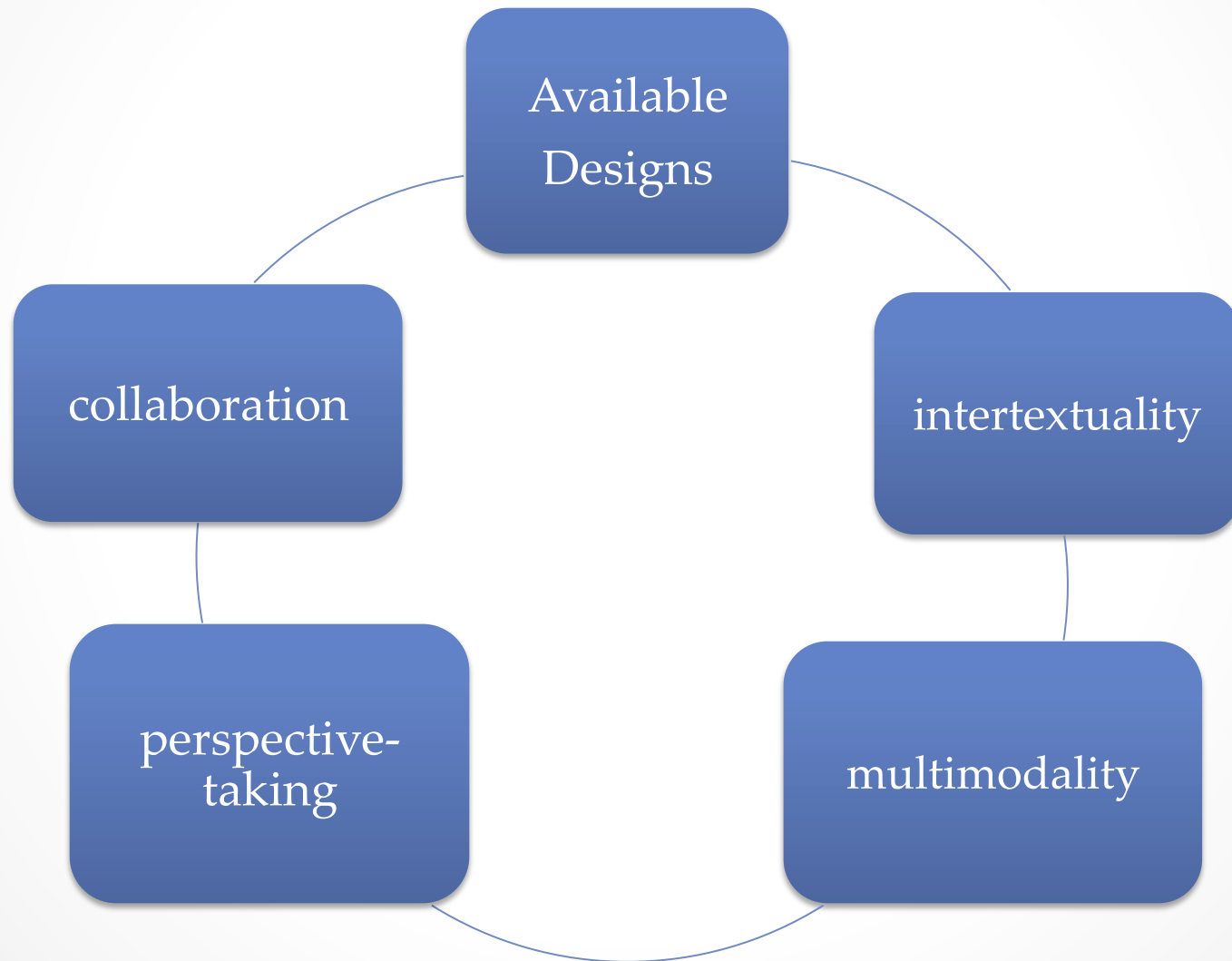
Examples of Design writing in undergraduate French

Course	Design Writing Tasks
Elementary French	• Roommate wanted post to Facebook group • Travel recount (online article)
Intermediate French	• Public health PSA • "Lieu d'enfance" childhood memory (online article)
Contemporary French Culture	• Movie review (written -> oral) • Letter manifesto on a social issue (written-> oral)
Creative Writing in French	• "Ethnotext" observation of a scene of everyday life • Personal narrative podcast (written -> oral)

Feasibility considerations for Design writing

- **Course/Curriculum:**
  - selection of genre & model text(s)
  - scope & sequence, fit of Design writing within larger course goals
  - vertical articulation among courses

- **Instructor:**
  - understanding of Design pedagogy
  - knowledge of planning writing workshop activities consistent with Design pedagogy
  - sustainability & collaboration

- •**Student:** beliefs & buy-in

Thank you!

Questions? Comments?

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